DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 023 447 PS 001 167

By-Grossman, Bruce D.

Extra-Curricular Parent-Child Contact and Children's Socially Reinforced Task Behavior.

Pub Date [63]

Note-12p.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70

Descriptors-*Affection, Grade 1, Middle Class, *Parent Influence, *Parent Student Relationship, *Reinforcement, Response Mode, *Task Performance

The purpose of this study was to determine if children with warm social contact with their parents (noncaretaking functions) are more responsive to social reinforcement than are children who are deprived of such contact. Data was gathered from interviews with mothers, who described the amount and quality of both parents' contact with the child. The sample of middle class children, 13 girls and 14 boys, performed a task twice. Responses were measured before and after social reinforcement. For girls, the results showed a positive direct relationship between warm social contact and initial response rate but not between parental contact and social reinforcement. In contrast, boys who had less warm social contact were higher in initial response rate and more responsive to social reinforcement. The results are discussed in terms of sex differences and different schools of thought concerning amounts of social contacts parents give to children. A bibliography is included. (JS)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Extra-curricular Parent-child Contact and Children's Socially Reinforced Task Behavior

Bruce D. Grossman
Hofstra University

ED023447

Author's Address: School of Education, Hofstra University, Hempstead, N. Y., 11550

PS001167

(abstract)

Extra-curricular Parent-child Contact and Children's Socially Reinforced Task Behavior

The principal intent of the present study is to investigate the nature and effects of parents' contact with their children in other than caretaking functions ("extra-curricular" contact). Parent data was gathered from home interviews with the mothers of 27 first-grade, public school children. Following the interviews, ratings were made on several dimensions of the parents' relationship with the child, including the amount and affectional quality of both the mothers' and fathers' extra-curricular contact. Each child participated in an experimental task situation conducted in the school. The task employed was a simple marble-drop similar to ones used by Stevenson (1961) and Gewirtz and Baer (1958). Periodic social reinforcement was initiated after an initial base-line interval.

The general findings indicate that for boys, a relatively greater amount of extra-curricular contact with either or both parents was significantly related to a tendency for a lower initial rate of response on the task, as well as a tendency toward a lower increment of increase in rate following social reinforcement. The affectional quality of the contact was unrelated to the boys' task performance. The findings for girls was quite different. In their case, initial task behavior was related to the rated affection of the extra-curricular relationship with both fathers and mothers rather than the amount of contact. Moreover, the relationship was a positive one, that is, in contrast with the boys, it was the girls whose extra-curricular contact with mother and/or father was the more affectionate who showed the highest initial rate of response on the task, though this tendency did not hold with regard to the rate of increase following social reinforcement.

The findings are discussed in terms of sex differences in recent studies by Bronfenbrenner (1961), Crandall (1963), and Kagan and Moss (1962), and in terms of popular trends and the psychological support for "closer", more equalitarian parental relations with children.

Extra-curricular Parent-child Contact and Children's Socially Reinforced Task Behavior

There is a great deal of current emphasis in the popular literature, as well as in popular practice, on the value of "closer", more equalitarian relations between parents and children than was traditionally prescribed. There is some psychological evidence, largely collected in the 1940's, to support this current trend and which most probably contributed to it.

In particular, the studies of home milieu conducted at the Fels Institute by Alfred Baldwin and his associates (1945, 1949) generally indicated that a democratic home milieu, with relatively close contact between parent and child, is likely to have a more desirable behavioral outcome than a home milieu where parents assume a more remote, authoritarian position relative to their children.

The Fels findings were in essential agreement with Lippittand White's (1940) patriotic observation that a children's group with democratic adult leadership is more effective in a task situation than either a laissez-faire or authoritarian arrangement. Working in still another area of developmental research during the same time period, Rene Spitz's (1945, 1946) pioneering studies of maternal deprivation revealed that feeding a child and maintaining the hygiene of his surroundings is not generally sufficient to assure the adequacy of development; the child must also receive social contact, a varied perceptual experience, etc.

The present study was designed to investigate some specific behavioral consequences of variation in contact between parents and children in a normal home situation. In particular, the study focuses on what is here termed <u>extra-curricular</u> contact; the interaction between parents and a child which does not primarily involve caretaking functions, i.e., which is not directly concerned with activities such as feeding and clothing the child. In the present case the variations in extra-curricular contact noted were observed in relation to differ-

ential responsiveness to social reinforcement administered in an experimental task situation.

What did we expect to find? The studies of home milieu and maternal deprivation cited above, as well as the neoanalytic positio (Erikson, 1950; Fromm, 1941; Benedik, 1952) which stresses the positive value of warm, supportive parent-child relations, would suggest that, within the normal range, children who had experienced the greater amount and quality of extra-curricular contact would have more social interest. On the other hand, experimental studies of social deprivation (Gewirtz and Baer, 1958a and 1958b; Hartup, 1958) indicate that it is children who have been deprived of warm social contact who are apt to be the more responsive to social reinforcement.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects (Ss) were 27 children (14 boys and 13 girls) drawn from two first-grade classes of a public school in Durham, North Carolina. The children ranged in I.Q. from 87 to 122 with a mean I.Q. of 107.6 according to the Kuhlmann-Anderson Scale, and judged from fathers' occupations, were predominantly from middle-class homes.

Home Interviews

The data concerning the parent-child relationship was based on home interviews with the mothers. The interview was similar to the one used by Sears Maccoby and Levin (1957). It lasted approximately one hour and was semi-structured in that the interviewer assured the completion of a pre-arranged schedule, but the mothers were allowed to elaborate extensively when so inclined. Gathering information about children from their own mothers has many

built-in problems. In this case an attempt was made to increase the accuracy of the mother's report by asking questions which could be answered in terms of specific descriptions of behavior rather than requiring the mother to make inferences about the behavior. The importance of accuracy was stressed and actual examples were solicited. The questions concerned the mother's own behavior, the behavior of her husband, and, to some extent, the behavior of the child.

Immediately after the interview, the interviewer made a number of ratings based on the mother's responses. Those ratings pertaining to extra-curricular contact referred to the quantity and quality of both parents' contact with their children. The ratings were made on a five point scale. The mother and father were each rated on the amount of extra-curricular contact with the child and on the affectional quality of this relationship. In addition, ratings were made of the mother's own satisfaction with her relationships with the child, and for both the mother and father, the interviewer made a global rating of the total quality of the parent-child relationship as judged from the interview. Thus, there were four (4) ratings made for the mother and three (3) for the father, all of which referred to their extra-curricular contact with the child.

Social Reinforcement Task

The social reinforcement measure was taken for each child separately while in school. The task employed was a simple "marble drop" similar to ones used by Stevenson (1961) and Gewirtz and Baer (1958). It had 5 holes in the top and the child was instructed to put marbles in, one at a time. When placed in the top holes, the marbles came out into a tray in front of the box where they could be retrieved by the child for further use. The two indices of performance used were: (1) the initial rate of response, i.e., the frequency of responses made

by the child during a 1-minute base-line period, and (2) the <u>increase in response rate</u> per minute averaged over a 3-minute period in which social reinforcement was offered by <u>E</u> for every third response.

RESULTS

The pattern of intercorrelations between the indices of extra-curricular parent-child contact is quite similar for boys and girls (Tables 1 and 2). The separate ratings are generally positively related with the exception of parental affection, which appears to be independent of the other dimensions of contact.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Tables 1 and 2 about here

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

For both boys and girls, the amount of contact that the mothers have with their children is significantly related to the rating of the mothers' satisfaction with the mother-child relationship. In addition, for the girls only, the amount of mother-daughter contact is positively related to the overall quality of the relationship. For both sexes, the mothers' satisfaction is also significantly related to the ratings of the overall quality of both the mothers' and fathers' relationship with the children.

The amount of extra-curricular contact the fathers' were reported to have with their children is significantly related to the overall quality of the father-child relationship, for both boys and girls. In addition, for the girls, the amount of father contact is also related to the amount of mother contact. As was noted above, the affectional quality of the parent-child relationship is independent of the other dimensions of contact, but for both boys

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Table 3 about here

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

and girls, the amount of affection shown by the mother is positively related to the amount of affection shown by the father.

The characteristics of task responsiveness in the present population have been described elsewhere (Grossman, 1967).

As may be seen in Table 3, an important determinent of the relationship between the measures of parent child contact and the children's task performance is the sex of the child. Both the neoanalytic and the deprivation positions discussed earlier receive some support here. The deprivation prediction is generally confirmed for boys. The actual amount of the mothers' extra-curricular contact with their sons proved to be the variable most clearly related to the boys' task performance. The boys who had relatively less contact with their mothers showed a higher initial rate of response, as well as a greater increase in response rate following reinforcement. In addition, mothers' satisfaction about their relationship with their sons, as well as the overall rating of the quality of the mother-son contact show a tendency to be negatively related to both the initial rate of response and the response increase following social reinforcement.

The aspect of the fathers' extra-curricular contact most directly related to the boys' performance is the rating of the global quality of the father-son relationship. The global rating is negatively related to the boys' initial rate of response, with a similar tendency toward a negative relationship with the increase in response rate following reinforcement. To summarize the findings for boys briefly, the trend is clearer for mother contact, but the data generally suggest that the boys who have experienced the most extra-curricular contact from either parent are apt to be the least responsive in the experimental task situation and least responsive to social reinforcement.

PS001167

For the girls, the findings are quite different (Table 3) and are generally consistent with the neoanalytic view. The girls' initial rate of response in the task situation shows a significant positive correlation with the mothers' satisfaction with the mother-daughter relationship and to the affectional quality of the girls' extra-curricular contact with both their mothers and their fathers. On the other hand, extra-curricular parental contact appears to be unrelated to the amount of increase in the girls' rate of response following social reinforcement.

DISCUSSION

The mothers' being the sole source of information about parent-child contact may be responsible for the positive relationship between the separate indices of extra-curricular activity found here, although the independence of the dimension of affection indicates at least some differential perceptions were operating in the interview. With this reservation, the concept of "extra-curricular" contact, as defined here, appears to be relatively homogeneous with the exception of affection, which is independent of the amount and the general quality of the extra-curricular relationship.

The pattern of parent-child extra-curricular contact observed reveals an essentially similar treatment for boys and girls in this age group. On the other hand, the outcome of parental contact, in terms of task responsiveness, is quite different for the two sexes. The findings are most clear-cut for the initial rate of response. They suggest that close contact with parents is likely to produce girls who are anxious to do well in a task situation. The opposite is true for the boys. Close parental contact is associated with a lower rate of responsiveness in the initial task situation.

The effect of differential parent-child contact on the response increase during the reinforcement period is less apparent. There is a trend for the boys of a negative relationship between the quality and satisfaction of extra-curricular contact and the increase in response rate following reinforcement, which is consistent with the direction of relationship observed during the initial response period. Part of the difficulty with the increase measure is the likely attenuation of response rate which is the outcome of the physical limits of the children who are performing at an initially high rate. The total rate of response during the initial and reinforcement periods is highly correlated ($r=+.95$ for boys, $r=+.81$ for girls), but the relative amount of increase is effectively independent of the initial rate ($r=+.17$ for boys, $r=-.28$ for girls).

Recent observations by Kagan and Moss (1962) and by Crandall (1963) indicate that the differential responsivity of boys and girls is an early and consistent trend of child development. The sex difference found here is likely to be at least in part attributable to the differential emphasis placed on independence in the training of boys and girls (Sears, Maccoby and Levin, 1957; Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Crandall, 1963). The closer contact with parents is generally considered more "acceptable" for girls than for boys and apparently produces a more favorable outcome in terms of task responsiveness. According to Crandall's (1963) analysis of the origins of achievement behavior, it seems likely that the dependency created by close contact with parents is conducive to the cooperative type of achievement found in girls, but interferes with the independently oriented achievement behavior noted in boys.

REFERENCES

Baldwin, A. L. The effect of home environment on nursery school behavior. Child Develpm. 1949, 20, 49-62.

Baldwin, A. L., Kalhorn, Joan and Breese, Fay H. Patterns of parent behavior. Psychol. monogr., 1945, 58, No. 268.

Benedik, T. Personality development. In Alexander and Ross (eds.) Dynamic Psychiatry. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952, 63-117.

Bronfenbrenner, U. The changing American child: a speculative analysis. Merrill-Palmer Quart., 1961, 7, 73-84.

Crandall, V. J., Dewey, Rachel, Katkosky, W. and Preston, Anne. Parents' attitudes and behaviors and grade school children's academic achievements. J. genet. Psychol., (in press).

Erikson, E. H. Childhood and Society. New York: W. W. Norton, 1950.

Fromm, E. Escape from Freedom. New York: Farrar and Reinhart, 1941.

Gewirtz, J. L., Baer, D. M. .Deprivation and satiation of social reinforcers as drive states. J. abnorm. soc. Psychol., 1958, 57, 165-172.

Gewirtz, J. L. and Baer, D. M. The effect of brief social deprivation on behaviors for a social reinforcer. J. abnorm. soc. Psychol., 1958, 56, 49-56 (b).

Grossman, B. D. Anxiety as a factor in the child's responsiveness to social reinforcement. J. genet. Psychol., (in press).

Hartup, W. W. Nurturance and nuturance - withdrawal in relation to the dependency behavior of pre-school children. Child Develpm. 1958, 29, 200.

Lippitt, R. and White, R. K. An experimental study of the effect of democratic and authoritarian group atmospheres. Univ. Iowa Stud. Child Welf., 1940 16, No.3.

Sears, R. R., Maccoby, E. E. and Levin, H. Patterns of Child Rearing. Evanston, Ill.: Row Peterson, 1957.

Spitz, R. A. Hospitalism. In O. Fenichel et al. (eds.) The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, Vol. I, New York: International Universities Press, 1945, 54-74.

Spitz, R. A. Hospitalism: A follow-up report. In O. Fenichel et al (eds.) The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, Vol. II. New York: International Universities Press, 1946, 113-117.

Stevenson, H. W. Social reinforcement with children as a function of CA, sex of E, and sex of S. J. abnorm. soc. Psychol., 1961, 63, 147-154.

Table 1

Intercorrelations between the Indices
of Parent-child Extra-curricular Contact

BOYS (N=14)

	MC	MA	MS	MQ	FC	FA	FQ
Mothers'							
Amount of Contact (MC)	--						
Affection (MA)	+.26	--					
Satisfaction (MS)	+.59**	+.19	--				
Quality of Contact (MQ)	+.32	+.36	+.64**	--			
Fathers'							
Amount of Contact (FC)	+.07	-.38	+.02	+.25	--		
Affection (FA)	+.02	+.54*	-.03	+.02	-.14	--	
Quality of Contact (FQ)	+.27	+.18	+.47*	+.68***	+.49*	+.31	--

* P. < .05 ** p. < .01 *** p. < .005

Table 2

Intercorrelations between the Indices
of Parent-Child Extra-curricular Contact

GIRLS (N=13)

	MC	MA	MS	MQ	FC	FA	FQ
Mothers'							
Amount of Contact (MC)							
Affection (MA)	+.35	--					
Satisfaction (MS)	+.68***	+.38	--				
Quality of Contact (MC)	+.72***	+.31	+.87***	--			
Fathers'							
Amount of Contact (FC)	+.47*	+.21	+.21	+.14	--		
Affection (FA)	-.20	+.68***	-.07	-.12	+.31	--	
Quality of Contact (FQ)	+.58*	+.38	+.49*	+.50*	+.69***	+.34	--

* p. < .05 ** p. < .01 *** p. < .005

Table 3

Parent-child Extra-curricular Contact
and Marble Task Performance

	Mothers' Contact				Fathers' Contact		
	Amount	Affection	Satisfaction	Quality	Amount	Affection	Quality
BOYS (N-14)							
Initial Rate of Response	-.72**	-.35	-.46+	-.45	-.06	-.13	-.61*
Increase in Response Rate	-.26	+.04	-.48*	-.44	-.21	-.21	-.43
GIRLS (N=13)							
Initial Rate of Response	-.26	+.75**	+.53 +	+.36	+.28	+.71**	+.32
Increase in Response Rate	-.20	-.14	+.07	+.18	-.28	-.17	-.34

+ p. $<$ .10 *P. $<$ .05** p. $<$ .01 (Two-tailed tests of significance)